Media Release

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Yakima County Experiencing an Increase in COVID-19 Cases

Yakima, WA- The Yakima Health District (YHD) continues to monitor COVID-19 disease activity and Yakima County is experiencing a steady increase in COVID-19 cases. As of July 15, Yakima County reported a case rate of 501 per 100,000 and a hospitalization rate of 5.0 per 100,000. About a month ago on June 10, Yakima County reported a case rate of 230 per 100,000 and a hospitalization rate of 0.4 per 100,000. The case rate has more than doubled and at the same time, we are seeing the impacts of the BA.5 variant and its transmissibility.

The BA.5 variant has been spreading quickly throughout the state and country. From June 19-25 in Washington State of the specimens that were sequenced, 37.3% were the BA.5 variant. Across the country, the BA.5 variant has become the dominant strain. Data shows that the BA.5 variant is better at evading preexisting immunity if individuals were previously infected or are without a booster dose. Utilizing a combination of public health recommendations are crucial to prevent future infections. Additionally, COVID-19 vaccines are successful in providing protection against hospitalization and death. As of July 11, of individuals 6 months and older in Yakima County, 59.5% have completed their primary series and 44.6% of those 5 years and older have received a booster dose.

COVID-19 Community Level

Yakima County is now considered to be at a medium COVID-19 community level according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The last time Yakima County was classified at this level was in February of this year and previously, Yakima County was considered to have a low COVID-19 community level. There are various preventative steps individuals can take depending on the community level in the area. For a medium COVID-19 community level, community members are urged to follow these public health recommendations:

- Stay home if sick and if individuals experience COVID-19 symptoms get tested.

- If using a rapid at-home test kits, individuals can report a positive test result by calling the Washington COVID-19 hotline at 1-800-525-0127.
- Stay up to date on your COVID-19 vaccine series and get a booster, if eligible.
- When gathering, seek opportunities with increased ventilation such as outdoors or with open windows.
- If individuals test positive, immediately isolate from members of their household. When entire households get sick with COVID-19 at the same time, it is extremely difficult for daily tasks to be completed. For more information visit the CDC: Caring For Someone At Home.
- Individuals who are considered high risk for COVID-19 illness should consider wearing a well-fitting mask like a surgical mask or a cloth mask with a surgical mask over it anytime when in public

It is important to note that individuals may choose to wear a mask at any time. If individuals are visiting a household with someone who is considered high risk for severe disease, consider self-testing before any contact with them and wearing a mask when indoors with them.

Quote
"Right now, most strains of COVID-19 are the BA.5 variant. This strain is extremely contagious and people without existing immunity or those that are unvaccinated are more subject to severe disease from this strain. People that have had Omicron previously and those that are vaccinated and boosted, will have the least problems from infection. This is another example of the ongoing evolution of the COVID-19 strain, and it's likely to continue. We are fortunate to have some tools, which will help prevent infection or render the infection less serious, such as vaccines, testing, and masking to protect us and our community from the virus. Because this variant is so contagious, more individuals in our community might get infected, thus people that would be likely to develop severe disease are at greater risk. We urge community members to follow public health recommendations to remain as safe as possible. If you have not received your booster dose, get vaccinated because the original vaccine plus two boosters, if eligible, offer the best protection even against the BA.5 variant. Don't wait, now is the time to get your booster dose."- Dr. Neil Barg, Health Officer, Yakima Health District

Additional Information
www.YakimaTesting.org
www.YakimaVaccines.org
Yakima Health District: Data Summary
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: COVID-19 by County
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Medical Conditions
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Caring for Someone Sick
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: COVID-19 Vaccine Booster Shots

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